

# SCREENPLAY READERS

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## LOGLINE

A young man must break from his past in order to find love in the future.

RECOMMEND       CONSIDER       PASS

## SYNOPSIS

MARIA MORETTI is a young Italian man from the streets of Brooklyn. He grew up an orphan. He sometimes worked for a mafia boss named PAULO DINI who liked the kid well enough but knew he wasn't meant for a life of crime. The only problem is that Paulo's daughter, MILENA, has been in love with Maria since the first day she's laid eyes on him.

We first meet Maria when he is 16 and Milena is 12. Four years go by. Paulo gets sent to prison for awhile and Maria takes a job watching over Milena and her kid sister REANA. Milena is still in love with Maria and tries to get any kind of response back. Maria rebuffs her. There is a flashback to Maria serving in the first Gulf War. We see him as a soldier in love with a Israeli journalist, TANKIAH. They have a sexual interlude in the middle of the desert, she tells him that she is pregnant and they profess their undying love for each other. They are captured by Iraqis and Maria sees his wife and future child blown up on a bus. Now we know why Maria is so pained to love again. Milena tries to put the moves on Maria who again rejects her and she ends up in the hospital. Milena was born with a bad heart and will eventually need a transplant.

Five years later and Maria is working as a custodian at the local college where Milena attends. Maria is well-liked and has

several friends. Milena is still madly in love with Maria and professes it in front of Maria, her sister Reana, Paulo and Paulo's ex-henchman, now bartender at his bar, MIKAH. Paulo likes Maria a lot and isn't worried except for the past. After Maria walks out of the bar, Paulo tells his daughters the story of Maria's tragedy. This leaves Milena in tears and loving Maria even more.

A little while later Maria stumbles upon a robbery in progress at Ho's Deli where two rednecks have taken some hostages, which includes Milena and Reana. Maria does some quick maneuvering and manages to free the hostages unharmed and let's the police arrest the two rednecks. There is a surprise party thrown in Maria's honor at Paulo's bar. Maria tells Paulo later that night that he intends to go out with Milena. Paulo gives his approval.

Milena and Maria have a great relationship for four months. One day, Paulo sets up a private meeting with Maria at the bar. He tells Maria that he wants her to run the family business as soon as he quits his custodian gig. Maria accepts. Just then, Mikah and Maria are watching the war in Yugoslavia on TV and Maria's ex-fiancé, Tankiah, pops up on the screen holding a baby while her husband is being interviewed by a reporter. Maria freaks out and asks Paulo to help them escape. Since Maria saved his daughters from the deli Paulo reluctantly obliges.

Tankiah, her husband and their baby make it to America without knowing why. They are set-up in a small house in New Jersey next to an abandoned warehouse. Maria closes out his savings account, quits his job and tailspins into depression. He secretly watches Tankiah and her family from the warehouse, drinking heavily bottles of cognac supplied by a friendly prostitute and never ever leaves. Milena goes into a deep depression, too. She has a heart transplant. Maria finally leaves the warehouse to go to the hospital and pray for her. She lives. Maria confronts his demons head-on, makes peace with himself and returns to Milena and the bar and the future.

#### COMMENTS

This screenplay goes all over the map. The many genres it suggests include gangster film (*Goodfellas*, *The Godfather*), love story (*Love Story*), terminal illness film (*Terms of Endearment*, *Untamed Heart*), war film (*Three Kings*), 70's NYC street drama (*Dog Day Afternoon*, *Serpico*, *Taxi Driver*), ethnic family comedy (*My Big Fat Greek Wedding*), etc., etc., etc. It's too much and

never achieves any of those films sophistication or tightly-constructed narratives. It aches to be seen in those terms but the level of writing here is undernourished and untrained.

The most unfortunate aspect is that the writing completely undermines the screenplay's overall ambition. That it has ambition is about the best quality going for it. It wants to be epic in scope while maintaining a personal and human core. It fails to execute.

The emotional texture of each character seems to be cut from the same cloth. Everyone is an over-emotional romantic with a big heart, even the redneck robbers give themselves up when their loved ones are personally threatened. The author seems to view the world in rose-colored glasses. These aren't characters so much as idealized puppets as seen through the eyes of a child or someone that has never been out in the real world. They would exist only in a fairy tale (and a rather bland fairy tale at that, no Queen of Hearts here calling for the head of Alice). The father, Paulo, used to be a mafia don and Maria is an embattled war veteran. Here, those facts seem to matter as plot points more than character-development. (What alcoholic would drink nothing but cognac, albeit an extremely wealthy one?).

The narrative is way too stuffy, too convoluted. It's not that it doesn't make sense but rather defies logic. It is overblown with all of its preoccupations. Milena's bad ticker, the little boy Angelo and his alcoholic mother, the cop Michael that is introduced and almost completely forgotten. These are elements that clutter up the story. This is a love story, at its center. Why have Maria fall in love all the way in Iraq and have an overwritten flashback sequence? The love scene in the middle of a minefield is the stuff of bad soap operas. That whole concept can be tightened up, given more weight with less expensive exposition.

Lose all of the *The Godfather* posturing and concentrate more on the three main characters: Maria, Milena and Paulo. There is your triangle. There is your possibility for drama, tragedy and conflict. Most of the other characters and situations just feel like filler. This script can be condensed by 35-40 pages and be much better and easier to read.

Try to create real people with honest conflicting emotions. All love stories have diversity and anguish at their core (the best examples are *Wuthering Heights*, *Rebecca*, *The Apartment*, *Jerry Maguire*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*). They squeeze the

focus of the narrative down to the core essentials and then conservatively add colorful nuances and side stories, if only to suggest a life beyond the central stage. What they don't do is drown in it. Stay away from mixing too many genres together. Only the most highly skilled technician can handle that load and even they fail many times (see *Ishtar* or *Vanilla Sky*, or rather, don't).

This is a love story. Don't steer away from that fact. You want real tears of joy and sorrow when this story ends not tears from people laughing so hard it hurts.

PASS